

Summit Addresses Pandemic Flu Preparations for Kansas

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, joined by U.S. Health and Human Services Deputy Secretary Alex Azar and State Senators Pat Roberts and Sam Brownback, addressed pandemic flu preparedness at the Kansas Pandemic Readiness and Emergency Planning Conference today at the Capitol Plaza Hotel in Topeka.

Health, business, emergency management, schools, faith-based groups, government, and agriculture officials from around the state attended the event.

Gov. Sebelius and Deputy Sec. Azar signed a planning resolution committing the state and federal governments to specific planning efforts. The agreement outlines the federal government's role in coordinating national preparedness in response to a pandemic. It also details how the federal government will continue to provide planning assistance and funding for pandemic preparedness to states.



Alex Azar, HHS Dep. Secretary, front left, and Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius sign a joint planning resolution between federal and state units of government to outline roles in coordinating responses to a pandemic outbreak. Looking on from the back row are, left to right, KDHE Sec. Roderick L. Bremby, Kansas Senators Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts.

"Kansas has significantly increased its preparedness level for pandemic influenza in recent years and will continue to work with federal, state and local partners to ensure we are doing everything possible to be ready for what world health officials believe to be an inevitable event," Gov. Sebelius said. "Kansas has worked diligently to develop a strong system for responding to emergencies of all kinds. Today's summit shows the collaboration we have been building and will continue to build among local, state and federal partners."

"Pandemics are global in nature but their effects are always local, so I am pleased that Governor Sebelius is taking a leadership role to prepare Kansas for this threat," Deputy Secretary Alex Azar said. "Pandemic planning needs to address how schools, businesses, public agencies, faith-based organizations and others participate in pandemic preparedness. With this meeting, local officials can identify needs specific to Kansas communities and begin crucial coordination to assure readiness if a pandemic outbreak strikes."

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HHS has provided Kansas \$1.1 million over the next year for developing pandemic response plans.

“Kansas was one of the first states in the nation to announce and release its Pandemic Flu Preparedness and Response Plan last fall. This was followed by more than a dozen public meetings around the state to increase public awareness of pandemic influenza,” said Roderick L. Bremby, Secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

“Additional federal resources and updated guidelines in recent months have further enhanced our planning efforts,” Bremby added. “KDHE and the Kansas Adjutant General’s Department are currently in the process of hosting a series of pandemic influenza symposiums to address pandemic flu preparedness among specific groups including education, business, faith and community-based organizations, agriculture, healthcare, and government.”

“It’s important that every Kansan begin to prepare for a pandemic by putting together a home preparedness kit that includes enough bottled water, food, and medications for each family member,” Bremby said. “Disruption of normal services in society is expected and this simple action can make a big difference.”

Other preparedness efforts will also increase the state's ability to respond to a pandemic. The Web-based Health Alert Network has been established for sharing public health emergency information with health and emergency management officials statewide; state and local disease investigation specialists have enhanced their surveillance for detecting cases of any unusual illness; and new partnerships for responding to emergencies have been formed among public and private organizations across Kansas.

Information on preparing for pandemic influenza is available on KDHE Web site at www.kdheks.gov, the HHS Web site at www.pandemicflu.gov.



KDHE Sec. Rod Bremby, and Asst. KDHE Sec. Doug Farmer discussed pandemic planning issues with Alex Azar, HHS Deputy Secretary, center, during a break in the May 31 pandemic planning summit in Topeka.